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RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 4584
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1841
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 1881
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4051
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4477
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9051
RHMFSS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LA PAZ 002657

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/02/2016

TAGS: SNAR PGOV PREL BL

SUBJECT: MORALES: WALKING A FINE LINE ON DRUGS

REF: A. LA PAZ 2637

1B. LA PAZ 2647

Classified By: Amb. Philip S. Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Following the September 29 death of two civilians who ambushed a GOB eradication operation in Carrasco National Park in Cochabamba, the Embassy's NAS section will begin supporting GOB eradication efforts in the park at the GOB's request. President Morales started spinning the conflict October 2, publicly declaring that the two civilians killed "are not cocaleros but narcotraffickers" in an effort to maintain the loyalty of his cocalero base. Regardless of how the GOB moves forward, this is likely a lose-lose situation for it, given Bolivians' predisposition toward blaming their government for civilian deaths. While Morales attempts to walk the political highwire, our role is to provide assistance to achieve US goals while keeping the GOB out in front. This event demonstrates that enforcing anti-drug laws can require tough decisions that go beyond Morales' simplistic rhetoric about coca being harmless. End summary.

12. (C) Following the September 29 death of two civilians who ambushed a GOB eradication operation in Carrasco National Park in Cochabamba, the Embassy's NAS section will begin supporting GOB eradication efforts in the park at the GOB's request. Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera expressed gratitude for the Embassy's September 29 offer to assist, stating that President Morales had decided to begin a serious eradication campaign in the park and would need U.S. backing. At Garcia Linera's suggestion, the DCM met September 30 with Defense Minister Walker San Miguel to coordinate Embassy logistical support for the GOB campaign. Based on that meeting, NAS-owned C-130s and helicopters will begin transporting Bolivian eradicators and troops October 2. San Miguel told the DCM that this crisis has created an opportunity for improved mil-mil relations. We are taking careful measures to provide only logistical support, and to encourage the GOB to respect human rights throughout the planned operations.

13. (C) President Morales started spinning the conflict October 2, publicly declaring that the two civilians killed "are not cocaleros but narcotraffickers" in an effort to

maintain the loyalty of his cocalero base. (Note: In fact, the civilians did not belong to the Six Federations of Cocaleros of the Chapare, and therefore were not part of Morales' core political support. End note). Cocaleros in Carrasco National Park have defiantly challenged the GOB, saying that they will defend their coca "with blood." While Morales manages the public side of the conflict, the GOB is investigating the deaths to confirm that GOB forces did not commit human rights abuses. (Ironically, forensic experts have determined that at least one of the injured was a victim of cocaleros' friendly fire).

¶4. (C) Comment: Regardless of how the GOB moves forward, this is likely a lose-lose situation for it given Bolivians' predisposition toward blaming their government for civilian deaths, as in October 2003. If the GOB takes a hard line and begins eradicating Carrasco National Park in earnest, the backlash from Morales' core political base could be strong. Morales went to the Chapare October 2 to meet with his base, and we will provide a read-out of that meeting septel. If the GOB instead attempts to finesse this conflict and fails, it will become vulnerable to further conflicts which it will also likely lose. The final option -- negotiating a deal which neither comes down too hard nor caves to cocalero demands -- is a fine line that may be impossible to walk, particularly since keeping the Constituent Assembly on track requires the GOB's full attention.

¶5. (C) Comment continued: While Morales attempts to walk the political highwire, our role is to provide assistance to achieve US goals while keeping the GOB out in front. In a rare move, the GOB has asked for Embassy logistical

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assistance to move military units to begin the forceful eradication of coca. We'll try to use opportunities that present themselves to help the GOB get back onto the right track on counternarcotics, including in signing a new LOA on future cooperation, and will hold out hope that the goodwill stemming from our assistance may create an opening for increased dialogue on broader issues, including democracy and mil-mil relations. In any case, this event demonstrates that enforcing anti-drug laws can require tough decisions that go beyond Morales' simplistic rhetoric about coca being harmless. End comment.

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